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GRAB JRP

The Price is Right

JRP Lives the Dream with His Boyhood Crush, Singer Tom Goss

By Mike Bahr

J.R. Price admits he's had a hard time connecting with Cupid's arrow in his life. "Growing up poor, with no friends and a family who didn't love me enough, left me feeling unworthy of love," he reflects. "I was gay, overweight, and never felt like I was the prettiest…"

He explores many of his early challenges in *"Daydream"*, his upcoming album that he refers to as pages from his younger self's diary. "All of the songs are windows into very personal experiences but I don't tell them in a sad way. The album is mostly fun Top 40 ear candy."

In *"Dance with Me"*, the fourth release from the album, JRP (as fans call him) teams up with his boyhood idol, singer Tom Goss, for an impassioned love song that he hopes will inspire the next generation.

Mike Bahr: Is the young JRP dying right now? I can't imagine what it would be like to sing a duet with my childhood crush.
J.R. Price: I'm literally dead! Tom Goss is on my album! I never thought I would get to this level, where I'm working with people I respect, but here we are, a duet with Tom and produced by Freddy Freeman, another one of my childhood heroes. Life is a daydream.

MB: Does Tom have any clue what his song, "Bears," meant to you?
JRP: I'm not sure if Tom is aware what "Bears" means to any of us! I mean every time I talk to him, I'm too starstruck to say anything about it. I mean without his video for "Bears," there wouldn't have been my debut video, "Body Positive." That's just fact. I look up to so many gay artists from my youth: The Gay Pimp Jonny McGovern, Cazwell, Adam Joseph, Colton Ford… sooo many, but Tom was the one who showed big men being sexy. Tom showed me I could be sexy. I credit a lot of my confidence to him. I don't think anyone gives pop music the credit it deserves! There is no way for Tom to know his true impact, but it is indeed great and I am so grateful.

MB: What was it like to grow up as

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JRP?
JRP: I was bullied for a lot of things. I was very feminine, we were poor, I was too passionate about school, and, of course, I was big. Deep down, I knew what I was doing when I ate junk food for comfort, or when I would hide bread under my bed to snack on at night. It was a choice. I was more upset about the things I couldn't control, like what I was wearing or how feminine I was, or who I had crushes on. Looking back, I know that kids are kids. We all make mistakes. Their hateful words gave me a really thick skin.

MB: Did your parents try to help you to lose the weight?
JRP: They definitely let me know that my weight was a problem, if that's what you mean. My father made cute nicknames for me like "Stubby" or "Haus" which was referring to an overweight character on a show he watched. My mother was worse though. She is very vain. I remember her locking the fridge up to keep me away from food. I think things would be different if I felt like their constant comments about my weight came from a place of love or care, but it was always clear that it was judgement and disappointment, which of course made me want to eat more. I think it's important that any parents reading this know the impact of everything they say. Even a slight "are you sure you want another roll?" can haunt someone for the rest of their life. Instead of judging, encourage healthy eating, and lead by example! "Maybe we should all cut bread out, let's try cauliflower rolls maybe? Together? It will be fun!" There can be a scoreboard with gold star stickers for healthy treats. Think positive!

MB: What do you know now that you wish you knew then?
JRP: It sounds so cliche, but I really wish I knew all of the things that made me different were what made me special. I know everyone says it, but you don't believe it until those bullies are still where you left them behind while you're thriving and chasing your dreams. I wish I knew that family

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means more than blood. It is the people who are standing beside you through every obstacle. Mostly, I wish I could go back to that ten-year-old baby JRP, the one with Britney Spears magazine cut outs covering his wall, and Cosmo's Hunk of the Month issues hiding under his bed... I would tell him that one day you are going to be in magazines just like these, and it's only because of what makes you different. If you were the same, well, that would be a very boring headline.

MB: Has it gotten easier as an adult?
JRP: It has gotten easier as an adult, but only because I absolutely do not care what anyone thinks of me anymore. I have learned that the only opinion that matters is the one you dream with. I never go to bed without reminding myself that this is all temporary, so only hold on to the good daydreams, never the bad nightmares!

MB: How are bears treated in the gay community today?
JRP: The "community" is changing every day. There is so much progress to celebrate! Praise gen z, yo, for real! That being said, the way gay people talk to each other is absolutely unacceptable. I've personally heard deplorable things from skinny people in the queer community, but I've also heard hurtful comments from fellow bears. I do not think the hate is just coming from twinks, or otters, or bears, or even straights, or skinny, or fat... forget all of that. The judgement is actually coming from within. Any time someone says anything, just remember they are only speaking out of insecurity. Own your body, it doesn't matter how people treat you. It matters how you treat them, and more importantly, how you treat yourself! We are all in the alphabet mafia together.

MB: What are your thoughts on those who fetishize bears?
JRP: If you listen to my album, you will hear that I don't mind if things get a little N.A.U.G.H.T.Y.! I am never one to kink shame. If you fetishize bears, cool, that's you bro. There is nothing wrong with appreciating a beautiful man for their girth. I think that twinks are just as fetishized, or any body type, ethnicity, gender identity, anything that classifies someone can be fetishized. That's fact. I think that it's actually empowering. I know everyone doesn't feel that way, but hear me out. A fetish is really just owning a specific thing that makes you special and letting yourself admit it's sexy! I've had some Chubb lovers make me feel very special and I'm not mad at it. Of course, now that I'm healthy and lost weight, they lost my number, but that's the game we are all playing. It just usually goes the other way. If a skinny person got fat and someone stopped texting them, we wouldn't be questioning if they were fetishized when they were skinny, would we? That being said, there isn't a negative connotation to the word fetish! It's a yaaaaasssss, I'm fetishized, yay, from me!

MB: What was the big a-ha moment that made you realize you are beautiful just the way you are?
JRP: I mean, I know I sing "Body Positive" and I'm supposed to have some big inspiring answer here but the truth is, every day is a struggle to see my beauty. You always hear those voices from your past: "fatty fatty two by four..." "Stubby, do you really need another roll?" "You know pop stars are supposed to be skinny." Also, every time I look in the mirror, I see that wrinkle, I notice I'm losing my hair and the extra skin from weight loss.... Even being healthy and losing weight makes me ugly! But those are all surface flaws. I'm beautiful just the way I am because I treat people with respect when they deserve it. I help anyone I can when I am capable of helping them. I support people, I'm loyal, I'm honest, I'm funny and I make people smile.

MB: What is your message to fans this Valentine's Day?
JRP: Love has so many beautiful meanings, it can be applied to all kinds of relationships. I am single, so very single, but I use V Day to spread love to all of the special people in my life. Make it your mission to make someone smile today. Pick a total stranger and show them love. I know a great gift idea: my album!

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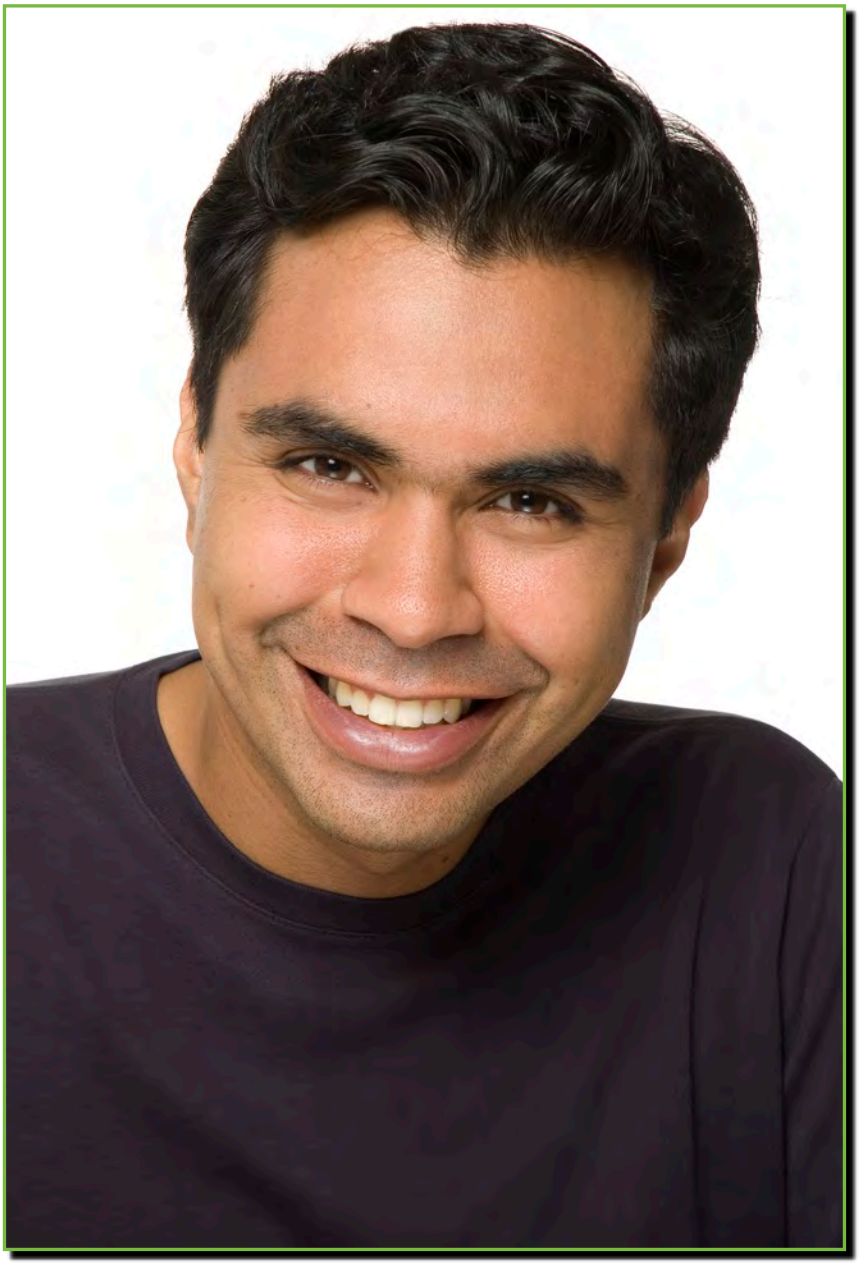
GRAB JESÚS

Welcome to the *Doll* house: An interview with gay writer Jesús Canchola Sánchez



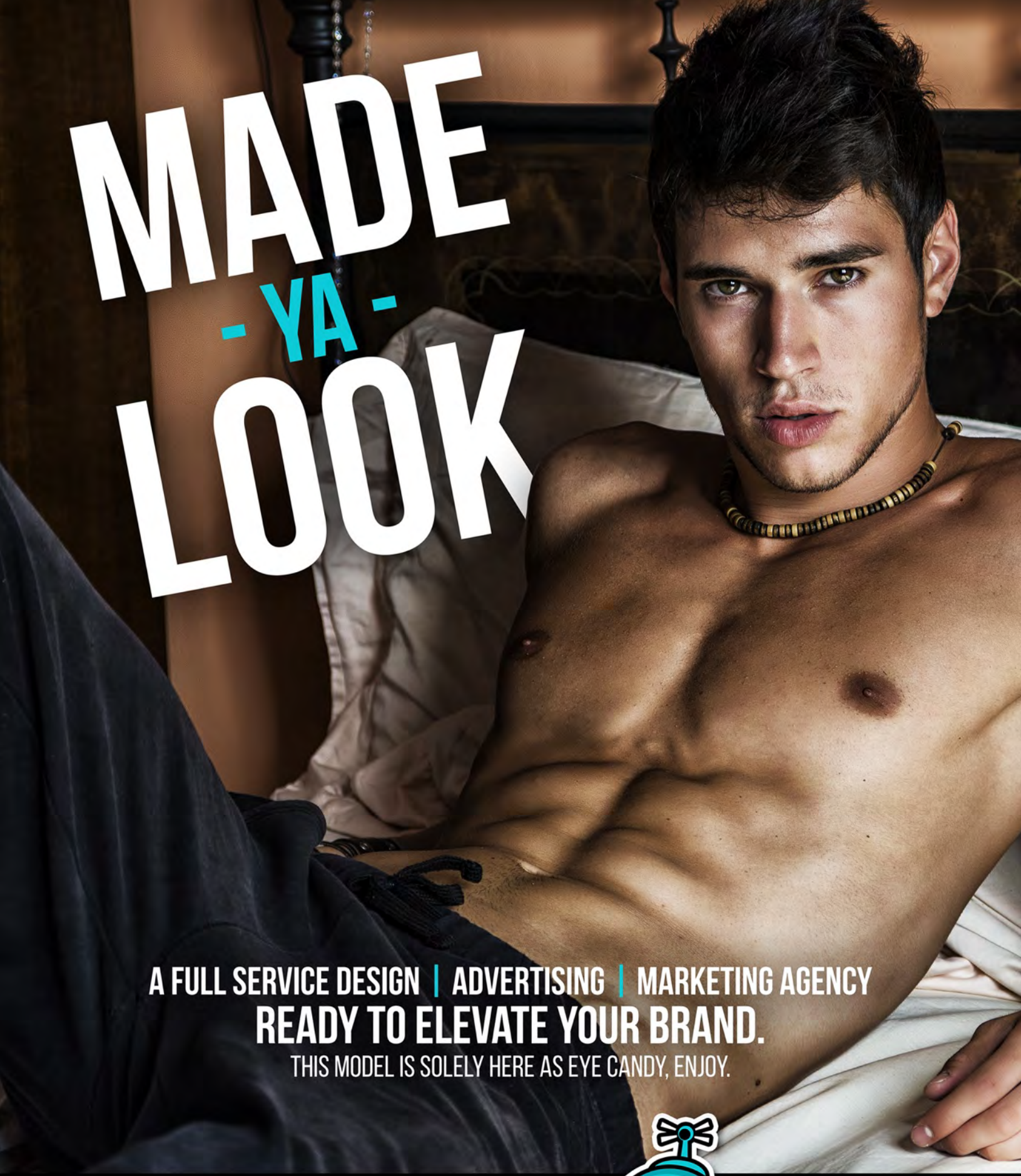
By Gregg Shapiro

Every year, there are more and more books for queer readers of all ages. This is especially true when it comes to young readers. The Y/A (young adult) genre, geared toward readers beginning at age 12, continues to boom with numerous titles published yearly. Younger readers, and their parents, also have an array of books from which to choose, including *Pepito Has A Doll/ Pepito Tiene Una Muñeca* by Jesús Canchola Sánchez, with illustrations by Armando Minjárez Monárrez. In English and Spanish, Sánchez tells the tale of the titular Pepito, and how his doll Lola, his best friend and protector Miguel and his loving and wise grandmother help him navigate the occasionally rough waters of childhood. Sánchez was gracious enough to answer a few questions in early 2021.

Gregg Shapiro: Jesús, I'd like to begin by congratulating you on the publication of your first children's book *Pepito Has A Doll/Pepito Tiene Una Muñeca.* How long did it take from concept to completion?
Jesús Canchola Sánchez: Thank you. The process took about two years.

GS: LGBTQ+-themed children's books have a long history, from *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman and *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Wilhoite to more recent titles including *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell and *George* by Alex Gino. How much, if at all, did any of these books influence you?
JCS: It's wonderful to join the long history of LGBTQ+-themed children's books with *Pepito Has A Doll/Pepito Tiene Una Muñeca.* I loved children's books as a child and continue to read them as an adult. Growing up, I was exposed to biblical children's stories and books like *Curious George.* I've always wondered the benefit my imagination would have received if I had been exposed to children's books that address non-traditional themes. As an adult, I sought ought these books and it was Charlotte Zolotow's *William's Doll* that touched me and inspired me to write my own children's story. It's amazing that it was published in 1972. In a way, *Pepito Has A Doll* is my version of William's Doll.

GS: *Pepito Has a Doll* features illustrations by Armando Minjárez Monárrez. What was involved in the process of finding the right illustrator for your book?
JCS: I met Armando while I was doing work with undocumented immigrants in Kansas. We became friends and I grew to respect his work as an artist. I reached out to him about the idea of Pepito and it felt like kismet from the beginning. I did an initial draft of the story and shared it with him. He started drafting the illustrations. We workshopped it off and on for about two years. We even did some focus group conversations with a mock-up of the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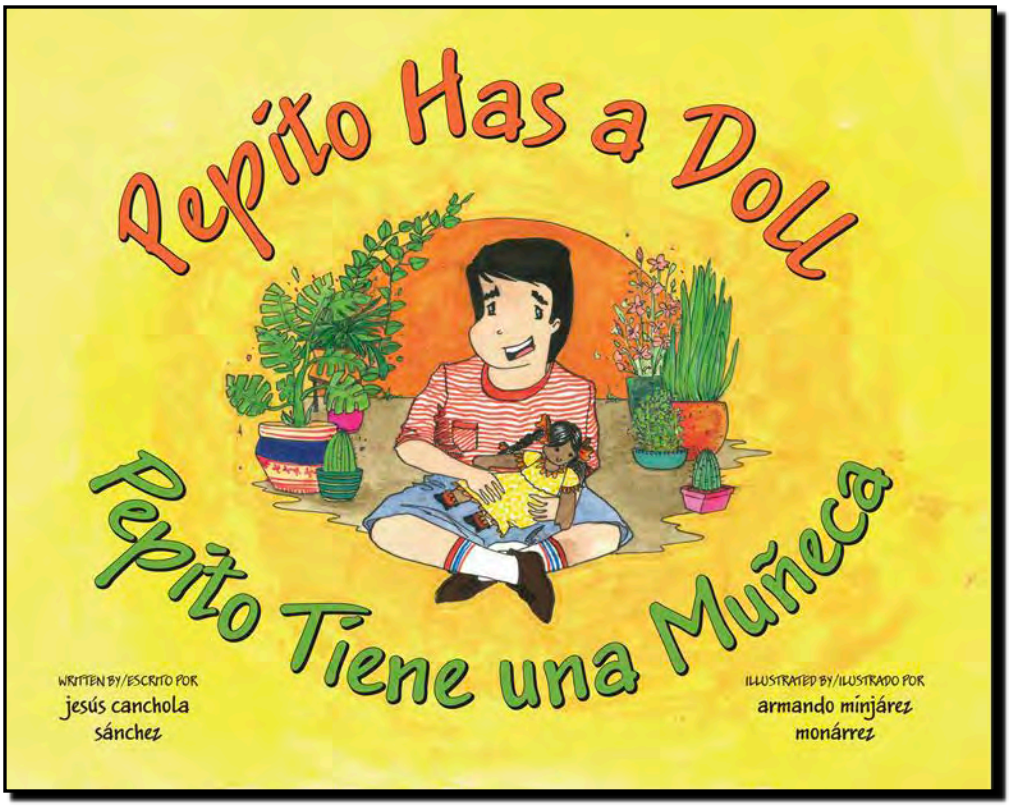
book which helped us get to a final version. Pepito became a story we both needed to share because it reflected our own experiences growing up as boys who played with dolls.



GS: I'm glad you mentioned that because in the back-cover bios for you and Armando, you both identify as boys who played with dolls.
JCS: I was a boy who grew up playing with dolls. I had family members who did not believe it was right that I play with dolls and they would take them away from me. As a child, I didn't understand the prejudice that was being directed at me. My grandmother was my saving grace. She allowed me to play freely. When I decided to write a children's book, I knew I wanted to reflect this in the story. Armando became attracted to the story because he also grew up playing with dolls. It was important for both of us to acknowledge that we were boys who played with dolls because it shaped the kind of story that *Pepito Has A Doll/Pepito Tiene Una Muñeca* is.

Unfortunately, there are still too many communities that believe it's wrong for boys to play with dolls and it's important for men who were boys that played with dolls to celebrate it openly.

GS: With that in mind, how much of Jesús is in Pepito?
JCS: Pepito is a seven-year-old version of me. Armando's illustration of Pepito is inspired by a picture of me when I was seven. The illustration of Miguel, Pepito's friend, is based on Armando's young self. The story is fictional, but it definitely has autobiographical components throughout.

GS: You mentioned your grandmother.
JCS: My grandmother, Beatriz Soto, has been a powerful force in my life. She just turned 92 and she continues to bring me light. I am the man I am today because of her.

GS: Have you started working on or thinking about your next book project?
JCS: The ideas are starting to come through for a potential follow up to Pepito. I want to

experience how things go with this first story first and then decide what comes next. Right now, I'm focusing my energy on working on my next feature film.

GS: Thank you for mentioning your film work, because in addition to being an author, you have a background as an actor and a filmmaker, directing and starring in the 2019 movie Bittersweet Waters. What has that experience been like for you?
JCS: *Bittersweet Waters* was my first film as a screenwriter and director. It was a dream come true to be able to produce my first feature-length project. I shot it entirely in Mexico. It's a Spanish language movie about a young man who is stifled by his traditional community and is unable to love openly. It premiered in 2019 in Mexico City. Watching it on the big screen for the first time with an audience was magical. We did the festival circuit and it's currently being distributed by TLA Releasing in the United States. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to do what I love. I just finished the screenplay for my next movie project titled *Uptown Lovin'*. If all goes well, I'll be going into production in 2021.

GS: Could you foresee making a short film out of Pepito Has a Doll?
JCS: Yes, it's possible. I also see a series of animated shorts about Pepito's adventures.

GRAB RUSSELL

Silver Fox Fever

The actor talks new Hulu series, a *Looking* reboot and leaning into his 'daddy' years

By Chris Azzopardi

Photo Courtesy of Robert Viglasky /Hulu.

Russell Tovey steamed up screens as Jonathan Groff's hunky boss on the HBO series *Looking*, about an intimate group of gay and queer friends living in contemporary San Francisco. Impassioned thoughts on the Richie-Kevin-Patrick love triangle abounded. And then the show ended in 2016, after just two seasons. But when it came to embodying gay characters on TV (and stage), Tovey was just getting started.

In addition to his theater work in the 2017 staging of *Angels in America* at the National Theatre in London, the openly gay British actor has gone on to play a passel of gay men across a swath of networks: Daniel Lyons, on HBO's six-part dystopian drama *Years and Years*; Harry Doyle, a James Bond-type role created with him in mind, on ABC's *Quantico*; and Ray "The Ray" Terrill, on the CW's *Arrowverse* crossover, *Crisis on Earth-X*.

Once in a while, Tovey plays straight. That is true of his role in Hulu's four-part twisty murder-thriller *The Sister* as Nathan Redman, whose past — which includes a dead woman, and a peculiar man named Bob — comes back to haunt him.

Outside of acting, Tovey produces a podcast called TalkArt, which is dedicated to all things art, with gallerist Robert Diament. Their book, *TalkArt*, comes out June 1.

Tovey's passion for visual art is apparent even on Zoom, where I connect with the actor and podcaster during the virtual junket for *The Sister*. A striking abstract painting hovers above him. "I haven't got any backgrounds that apply naturally where I can sit," the 39-year-old says.

Jokingly, I ask Tovey whether every interview he does on this press day will feature a new work from his vast collection. You know, to keep it fresh. "Every interview is a different work of art," he wryly kids, laughing. "It's not about *The Sister*. It's about my art collection. You don't realize because subliminally you're seeing it all. You *think* we're talking about the show."

Chris Azzopardi: Well, it seems you've gotten past the "pizza and wine every night" phase of the pandemic. Where are you at right now mentally, etcetera, etcetera, with all of this?
Russell Tovey: Mentally, etcetera, etcetera: 10,000 steps a day, trying to get that in. Walking the dogs. Making sure that I'm getting out of the house. You're right, I did have the pizza and the bottle of red wine a night. That was fun for a while, then I think I got a bit too heavy and a bit out of breath walking from the bathroom to the kitchen. I thought, "This is something that has to change."

I've been filming things. Before Christmas I was doing a movie with Priyanka Chopra and Sam Heughan and Celine Dion, and that was amazing. A rom-com in London. And then last week, I just completed an improv movie I've been doing in Wales here, so I've been really fortunate that the filming is something that we've been allowed to do. Yes, we've been getting COVID-tested every two days, but I think everyone's so determined to keep working and telling stories that you jump through all the hoops, whatever they

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CA: I'm glad that you noted that you're getting tested, because with the movie you're referring to, *Text For You*, my first thought was: You have to protect Celine Dion at all costs.
RT: Yes, *of course!* Can you imagine if you was responsible for anything that happened to Celine Dion?

CA: What has been your experience filming during lockdown?
RT: It's made everything more economical. That feels really great in some ways (laughs). There's less time to socialize as a group of actors. You do the work and you get out. So that feels good.

CA: With *The Sister,* I was impressed by your ability to cry.
RT: I'm a very emotional person. I've got lots of things that I draw on throughout my life: sad events, stories and stuff. This (is) a bit psychopathic, but actors are able to retain the essence of a feeling in our psyche. And what other job can you cry your eyes out and everyone gives you a round of applause after? You don't do that anywhere else. You'd be straight up to HR and they'd be firing you or giving you, like, some time off work (laughs). But with acting, you are kind of blessed with the fact that you can exercise emotions through the characters you play.

CA: Your story arc in *The Sister* has a poignancy that allows you room to emote. In one of the more poignant scenes, I love that your gray hair got written in. It's acknowledged in its own line in the last episode.
RT: (He shows off his gray hair.) I can't get away from it now! It's happening. It's a reality. But you're seeing Nathan in three different sections of his life, and that was what's so important to me: finding an authenticity at each stage of his life. At the beginning I wanted to make him a really hopeful, enthusiastic, kind guy that you knew was being kind of sexually awoken. (He's) really excited about the world, and that gets ripped away. I wanted the loss of Nathan to be something that holds him throughout the rest of his life. And as an audience, even though he's problematic and a flawed character, you feel such pain for the loss of what could've been.

CA: With the gray hair, I wonder if there's been an influx of silver fox comments.
RT: "Silver daddy" — yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I'm gonna be 40 this year, so I'm definitely officially daddy status, I guess. And I have embraced my graying hair. It's pretty full gray now. So yeah, every now and then I'll get "yes, silver fox!" "yes, daddy!" on my Instagram and I'm all for it.

CA: Is there a different kind of challenge in playing a straight role like this that you don't get playing a gay role?
RT: Every character that I play, I just want to find the truth of who they are emotionally. Gay, straight, bi, anything, I just want to make sure that I can feel their honesty and I know who they are emotionally. I guess it comes up when you're in sex scenes. I guess that's a time when you really do consider what this character is. But fundamentally I don't really look at it too much like that. It's like you're pretending and tricking your body into feeling things. Emotionally connecting on a level to something that you're not fully aware of. I've played aliens, I've played

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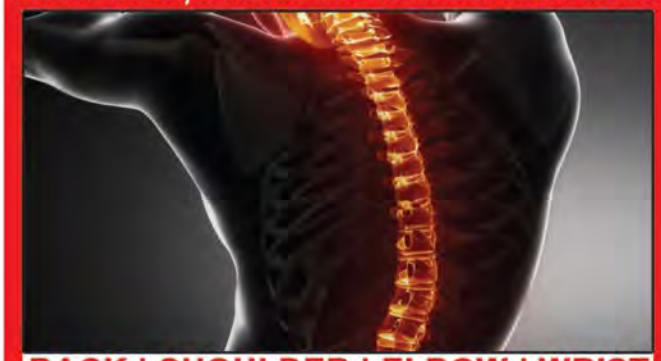

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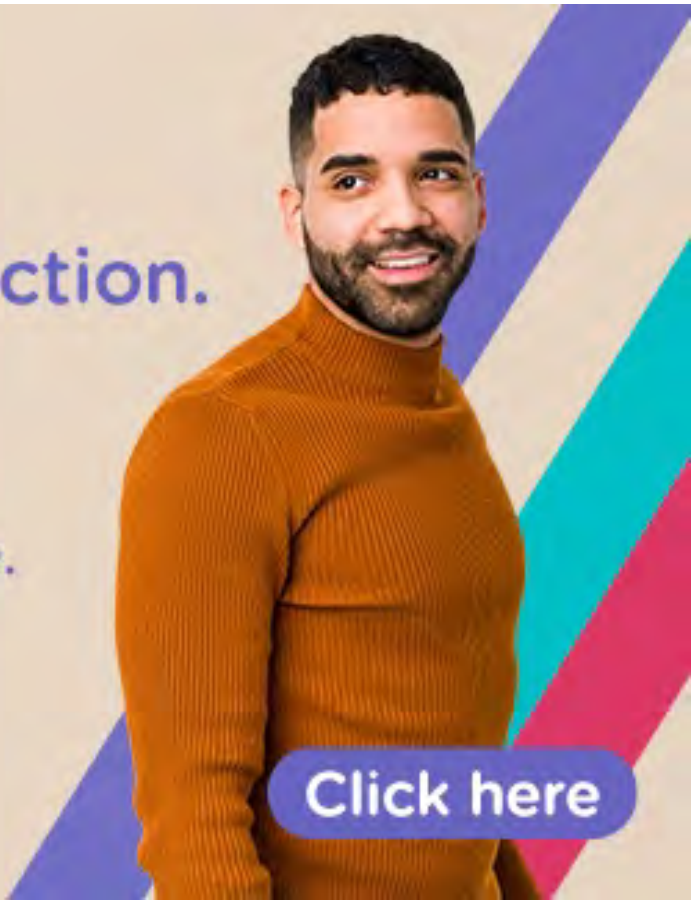

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werewolves. Whatever you do, whoever you're playing, you just want to root them in a reality that people can connect to.

CA: *Queer as Folk* creator Russell T Davies, who you worked with on *Doctor Who* and *Years and Years*, recently said that gay actors should play gay roles. The argument made by some is that, if that's the case, only straight roles should go to straight actors. What's your take?
RT: It felt really important for him that there was an authenticity in such a very kind of queer community-based piece (Davies's new HBO series _It's a Sin_). But my feeling is that we're in a world where there are marginalized people — be it sexually, be it racially — that haven't got an opportunity to tell their story, so until there is space made that everybody can authentically tell their story, whoever they are, then there's more work to be done.

And I'm not saying, "Take these jobs away from other people," because I'm an actor and I love acting and I love to pretend to be *everything*, as we're saying about playing straight. But we need to make space (for) the people who haven't authentically become superstars by telling their truthful story of their authentic life lived.

CA: You wanted to be an actor in hopes that you could make people feel the way Robin Williams made you feel when you watched him in *Dead Poets Society.* Reflecting on that, which of your roles have made you feel like you've achieved that?
RT: You mentioned *Looking*. I think that was an incredibly important show for me, creatively, personally — the people I worked with, the way it was made, the stories it was telling, the time it was telling the stories. I thought, "That's a show that's going to be discovered forever."

I feel like all queer stories sometimes get marginalized and overlooked, but they remain beacons of hope for so many people around the world who can discover them at all different stages. (With) *Looking*, I'm a fan of that show. Even though I'm in it, I can watch it and care about Patrick and Richie.

CA: What are they up to? It's been five years. I want a second movie.
RT: Are Patrick and Richie still together? Unsure, I don't know. But I think (my character) Kevin is someone that has probably rebounded a few times, cheated on his boyfriend a bit more, still with his boyfriend, and probably had a couple of other experiences similar to his experience with Patrick. I would say that he is someone who hasn't really done the work on himself. I think he's

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probably had a "fuck it" button that he's pressed after the kind of rejection of Patrick, and I think Kevin is someone who doesn't do well with rejection.

CA: It sounds like you have a script ready to go.
RT: Everybody at the time — (the show) was so attacked in some ways. The people who are discovering it now are like, "This is a work of genius, and it is beautiful." Out of everything I've ever done, that is the one show where I would literally bite the hand of whoever it was who said, "Do you want to do a special? Do you want to do another season?" They brought *The Comeback* with Lisa Kudrow 10 years later; it would be amazing to do a revisit of *Looking*. I would love that.

CA: Do you have Zooms with Jonathan Groff? Are you still in touch?
RT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We still talk. He's doing incredibly well. I love him. He's a superstar. Just this wonderful, big-hearted genius that is the most perfect person you could ever meet. He's not on any social media, so I don't think he's contaminated by all of the crap… . I don't think he knows what a troll is, do you know what I mean? (Laughs.)

CA: With your TalkArt podcast, how did you connect with Elton John to get him on it? Do all British gays just know each other?
RT: (Laughs.) They kind of do. They're kind of connected! But I've met Elton a few times, and so I connected to him way before the pandemic and he was like, "I'm busy, I'm touring the world." And then obviously lockdown happened. I just emailed Elton and he was like, "Yeah, let's do it." So that's how we got Elton, and the same with Billy Porter and Rufus Wainwright.

It felt really important for everybody to connect with other people, and what better way to connect than through art and culture, because that's the best way as humans of understanding the human experience. Through art we can understand other people. And through art, if you see yourself represented or hear yourself represented, then you cannot be denied your existence.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

As editor of Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.

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1	ATB & Topic X A7S	Your Love (9PM) (Original Mix)
2	DJ Shaan & Londin Thompson	By Heart
3	Wilson x ManyFew x Kelli Leigh	No More Chances (Radio Edit)
4	Lucas & Steve	Another Life ft. Alida
5	Tommy Capretto	Breath (Original Mix)
6	DLMT x Mahalo	Destination
7	Tungevaag & Rat City	Afterparty ft. Rich The Kid (Joe Stone Remix)
8	David Guetta x MORTEN	Dreams ft. Lanie Gardner
9	Gryffin & Audrey Mika	Safe With Me
10	Alison Wonderland	Bad Things (Kaidro Remix)
11	DJ D Sol	Someone Like You ft. Gia Koka
12	Moodshift	What About My Love
13	Promise Land	I Want Your Love ft. Sandy B
14	Ytram & Elderbrook	Fire
15	RAYE ft. Rudimental	Regardless
16	Steff Da Campo	Saving Your Soul (Radio Edit)
17	The Shapeshifters	Finally Ready ft. Billy Porter (David Penn Remix)
18	Jax Jones	I Miss U ft. Au/Ra
19	Anton Powers x Joe Stone	Do Me Right
20	KREAM	Water ft. Zohara
21	Rene Rodrigezz ft. Sophia May	The Moment (Intro Edit Mix)
22	Fiorious	Follow Me (Roger Sanchez Radio)
23	Joel Corry	Head & Heart ft. MNEK
24	Anabel Englund x MK	Underwater (Redfield Remix)
25	Justin Caruso	Highs & Lows
26	Cat Dealers & Guz Zanotto	Save Me Now ft. Moore
27	Bingo Players & Disco Fries	Forever Love ft. Viiq
28	Allegra	Do What I Want (Alex Gaudino & Dyson Kellerman Remix)
29	OneUpDuo	Trn It Up (StoneBridge & Lil' Joey VIP Mix)
30	Topic X A7S	Why Do You Lie To Me ft. Lil Baby (Twocolors Remix)
31	Breathe Carolina X Robert Falcon X Conor Maynard	IF U (Radio Edit)
32	Zookeper	Body Talk
33	Rudimental	Come Over ft. Anne Marie & Tion Wayne (Tommy Farrow Radio Edit)
34	Drove	Places ft. Dillon Francis
35	Sofia Carson	Guess I'm A Liar (Tracy Young Radio Mix)
36	Chantel Jeffries ft. Shaylen	Come Back To Me (Clean)
37	Josh Cumbee	Sound Of Your Name (Zonderling Remix)
38	Bingo Players x Felguk x Fafaq	Devotion (Will Sparks Remix)
39	Imanbek & Goodboys	Goodbye (Main Mix)
40	Dixie D'Amelio	Be Happy (Dillon Francis Remix)

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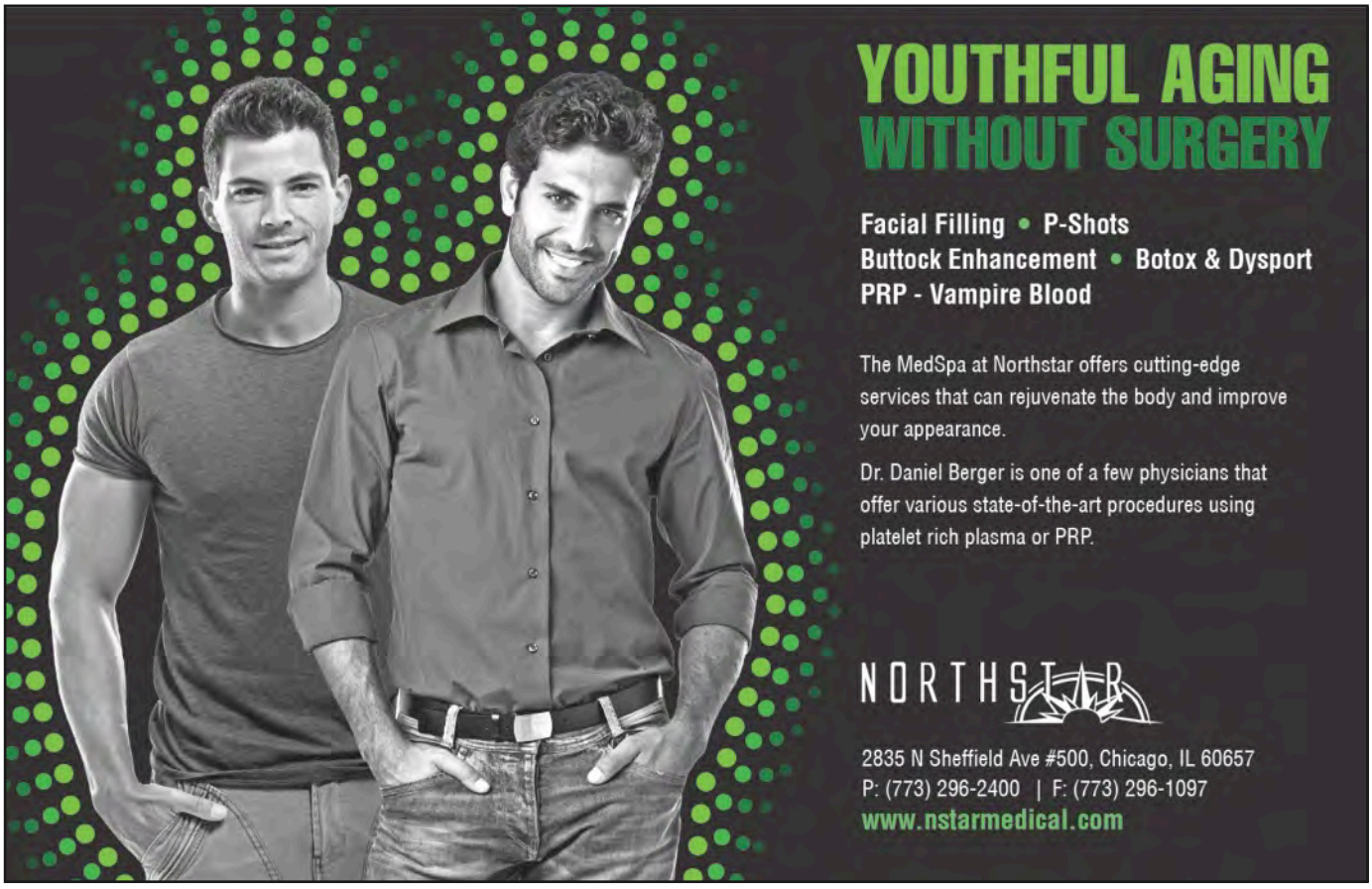
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GRAB STANLEY

Stanley Tucci Is the Gayest Straight Actor You Know

The beloved actor talks playing gay since 1996, people thinking he's gay and texting Cher

By Chris Azzopardi

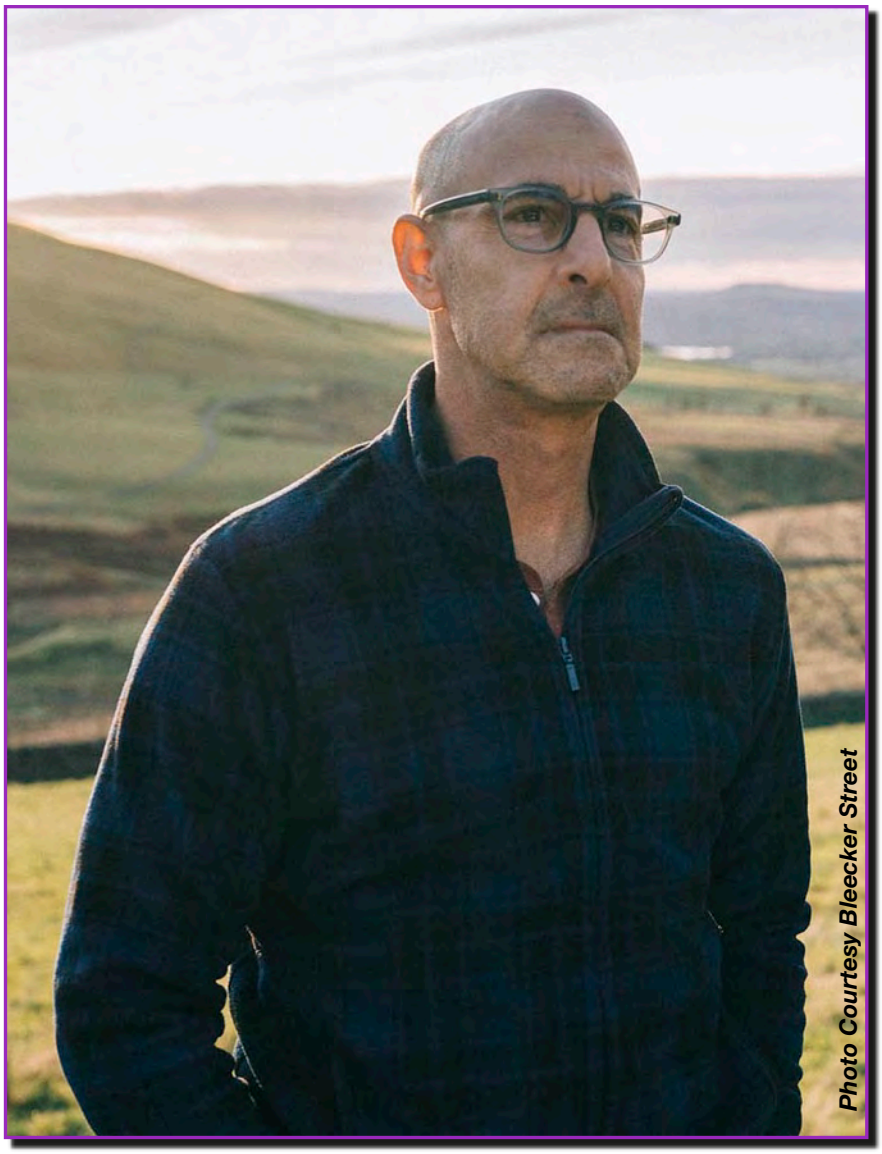

Photo Courtesy Bleecker Street

Stanley Tucci has survived the icy death stare of Meryl Streep's Miranda Priestly and told Cher to her face that she looks like a drag queen. Aside from starring as the queer second-in-command next to those gay icons in "The Devil Wear Prada" and "Burlesque," the 60-year-old actor also donned a poofy wig in "Little Chaos" as the king's gay brother.

The chameleonic actor is at it yet again with his latest gay role — Tusker in "Supernova," a moving portrait of a couple in crisis written and directed by Harry Macqueen. Here, he portrays a man suffering from early-onset dementia alongside Colin Firth's Sam, his partner of 20 years.

Aboard their old RV, the couple head out on a road trip across the mountainous region of England's Lake District to visit people and places that are special to them, their love tested as Tusker's memory continues to deteriorate.

During a recent call, Tucci talked about being a straight man who's been playing gay since 1996, his wife finding out that the internet *thinks* he's gay, and how he can't believe so many people actually tell him they love "Burlesque."

Chris Azzopardi: During the pandemic, I watched "The Daytrippers," which came out in 1996, and realized that you've been playing gay even longer than I thought.
Stanley Tucci: Ha! That was my first gay kiss. I loved that movie so much. (Writer-director) Greg Mottola made that for no money, like $65,000 dollars or something.

CA: When it comes to the way the film treated homosexuality, how do you compare a role like that, as Louis, to your role as Tusker in "Supernova"?
ST: What I love about "Supernova" is that sexuality isn't even an issue. They're just two people who've been together in a long relationship for a long time, and they love each other. You could've made it with a heterosexual couple, but I think this is more interesting. And the fact that it's never dwelled on — it's never even mentioned — is fantastic, and hopefully more movies like that will be made.

What I loved about "Daytrippers" was that there was no judgment on the part of anyone and the fact that this character was gay. What I liked was that it showed his complete confusion and how he felt he was supposed to live his life one way and then — we see it only in the end — when he says, "Help me. I don't know what to do. I'm really confused." I liked that because there are a lot of people like that.

CA: I remember the days of a straight actor playing a gay man and how there was talk of how "brave" that was. What was the conversation around you playing gay in 1996 versus now?
ST: You know what, there wasn't even a conversation about it. I'll be honest: It wasn't a conversation. Also, I was barely in the movie. You see me at the beginning and then you see me at the end, so there really wasn't enough there

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to talk about.

CA: How have you gotten away with playing gay all these years when so many straight actors have not?
ST: You have to tell me how I've gotten away with it. You're the one who has to tell *me*. Ha! I don't know! I don't know! Somebody said recently — it was written in a magazine or something: Colin and I are the only two straight men who, as far as they're concerned, are allowed to play gay men, nobody else.

CA: I've been telling my friends that I think you're able to get away with playing gay because people think that you *are* gay.
ST: Ha! There was a time when there were a lot of people out there who thought I was gay. I don't think that's the case anymore, but I don't know. Who knows. After this movie, you never know.

Listen, my feeling is: Whatever role you play, you just have to be truthful to the character and to the tone of the film. And if I'm presented with something, whether it's a gay character or a straight character or whatever character, if it doesn't ring true to me, then I really can't do it. Or I will do my best to have it rewritten, rewrite it myself, change the lines, and do it the way it should be done.

CA: I'm curious about this time in your life when people thought you were gay. When was that? What do you remember from that period?
ST: I don't remember anyone coming up to me and saying, "You're gay, aren't you?" It wasn't *quite* that. Ha! But it was quite a while after "The Devil Wears Prada," and I remember when I was dating Felicity (Blunt), my wife, she'd punch in my name on the internet and the first thing that would come up was "Stanley Tucci Gay." She was like, "See, look!" I was like, "Wait a minute!"

I didn't really care. And now if you punch my name in, I don't think that's the first thing that comes up. It probably just comes up "Stanley Tucci Old."

CA: There's been increasing pushback on straight actors playing LGBTQ roles. For you, is there apprehension or a different kind of thought process when considering playing a gay role, and how has that changed for you over the years?
ST: No, I'm not apprehensive. I do want to make sure there isn't — and I always feel this way — someone out there who's better for it than I am. And if there are people who are gay who are more right for it, then they should be doing it.

Now, I think that the problem here is that one of the reasons that gay actors have not played gay roles is that a lot of gay actors weren't able to come out and be openly gay for so long, not just in society but in Hollywood. So you couldn't be an openly gay actor because you would only be cast as a gay person, if you were lucky enough to be cast at all, and because you might be ostracized because you're openly gay.

Now that that's beginning to change, there can be more of a level playing field and gay characters and actresses can be openly gay _and_ play straight roles, play gay roles, play whatever roles. And that's where we need to get to. There was this, "You were either typecast or you weren't cast." That holds true for the African-American community. It held true for the Hispanic community. It held true for Italian-Americans, and I can certainly attest to that. And it's very

Photo Courtesy Bleecker Street

disconcerting. I think what's happening now, finally: the playing field is at the very beginning of starting to be level.

CA: What about your relationship with Colin allowed you to so naturally play two men who've loved each other for a lifetime?
ST: Because we love each other. I love him. The only thing that would be different than what's on screen would be the sex. But I just love him. I'd do anything for him. He's like a brother I never had. When you come to know each other so well over 20 years at our age, and you've been through a lot — you've been through a lot of loss, you've been through a lot of difficult times, you've raised children, you've seen them go through hard times, you've helped each other out through all of those hard times — that's what great friends do for each other, which is not dissimilar to what married couples do for each other. And so you have all of that. It's all there.

CA: And you traded roles in this film with Colin. Have you ever considered swapping roles before with another actor? Or ... an actress?
ST: Ha! With an actress!

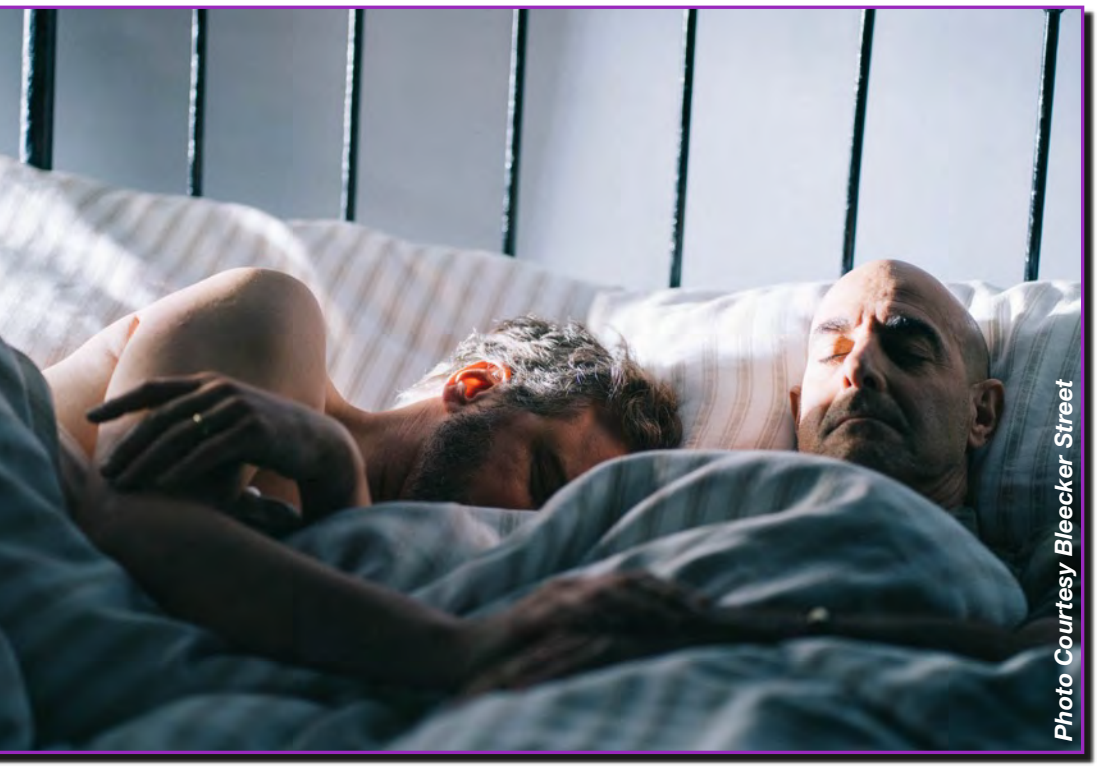
CA: Maybe Cher in Burlesque?
ST: She was desperate for my role. The only problem was I couldn't sing, so we had to keep it the way it was. Ha! But to answer your question, no, that's never happened before. And it's very unusual that that happens. Again, if you're good friends, you can do that.

CA: You've acted alongside Cher and Meryl. What other gay icons would you happily call your boss? Barbra, Gaga, Elton, Mariah, Madonna and Liza all come to mind as options.
ST: All of them. I met Elton John a couple of times, and I met Liza Minnelli a couple of times, and I mean, as a straight man, I almost had a heart attack. They're just… these people are just incredible people. That talent is just staggering to me.

And I think working with Cher — I know she's a gay icon and I had the biggest crush on her as a kid, and to be able to meet her and work with her and become *friendly* with her is just … you know, sometimes I show my kids my phone and I go, "I'm just texting Cher."

CA: Did you dislike "Burlesque" as much as Cher? She famously admitted she found it "horrible."
ST: Yeah, ha! You know what? It had potential, but it didn't quite live up to it. Let's put it that way.
CA: It's lived on in the gay community, though. You must know that.
ST: I know! I can't tell you how many people come up to me, and not only people from the gay community. Everybody comes up and they go, "I love that movie. I love 'Burlesque.'" And I'm like, "Oh my god — really?"

As editor of Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.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GRAB HOLLY

Broken Hearts, Breaking Camp

By Holly Maholm

I decided to walk over to the Camp of the Legionnaires, to see what it looked like now that the football team members (the straight guys) had packed up and moved out. When I arrived, I found the LGBT students sitting – silently – in a circle around their fire pit, which was empty and cold. Looking around, I saw here and there bare spots in the grass where the team members had pitched their tents, each patch of dead grass a testament to the barren, empty space their departure had left in the hearts of their teenage friends.

Standing to one side I saw Larry, the Vice Principal, who was silently observing the scene. I greeted him as cheerfully as I could, "So, Larry, this is quite a change. The place looks deserted." "I know," he replied, "it's a shame."

He paused, then went on. "I have to confess, this really hurts. I'm just the Vice Principal here, and I don't guess I'll ever move up to 'Principal,' or anything more exalted than what I am now. But to me, what's been accomplished out here in this field is the biggest achievement of my career. So… it hurts to see it ending. Well, not altogether ended, cause the gay and trans kids are still here, but the part about bringing them all together with straight guys, I mean.

"Fact is, most people – unless they have a job where they deal with teenagers every day – don't appreciate how important it is to the development of young men to give them… 'challenges.' And this encampment has been a tremendous challenge for all the young men who camped here.

"First, it brought the gay and trans kids together in a place of their own, where they could hear and support each other, free from bias or bigotry. They were challenged to band together and live the way ancient Roman soldiers lived – away from comfortable beds and ever-present cell phones and social media. And they've mastered a challenging curriculum of historians, poets and philosophers.

"But, my greatest accomplishment was getting the straight guys – who did not always come from supportive homes, and whose parents were suspicious of both Dave and the LGBT kids – to come together with the Legionnaires into one powerful group of young men.

"It was obvious to all of us: The longer the gays, trannies and straight guys camped out in our little bit of 'wilderness' here, the more those 'boys' matured into self-reliant young men; men willing to accept anyone as a friend who was willing to work hard and pull his own weight."

Larry looked wistfully around the campsite and summed up, "This is a setback, but I'm not giving up. This 'Roman soldier' education and 'camping out' experience would help any teenager – gay or straight – develop those 'masculine virtues' we need in our world. So I lost this battle, but not the war." I gave Larry a supportive hug, and he returned to the school.

I let my gaze drift around the camp, and I noticed one camper off alone to one side, sitting on his rolled-up tent. It was Josh, the quarterback of the team, who had confided to me he is gay, but who could not come out without suffering at the hands of his parents, his teammates and the Coach. I sat down next to him.

"You need help packing up your stuff?" I offered. I could see he had been crying. "No, I'm okay," he responded, his voice breaking. "This really sucks."

"I've gotta go pitch my tent over behind the bleachers, where Coach is setting up his 'Bible Village.' Yeah, that's what he calls it. He says if Dave's 'perverts' can have a Roman army encampment, then he can have a village like they had in the Bible. He says we're gonna spend a lot of time on Bible study – cause he claims it's just as much 'History' as the Roman and Greek historians we've been reading. But honestly, it's just an excuse to push religion on us. Which no one wants.

"For me, this is a disaster. I can't stay with the gay guys, who've been nothing but friends to me, even if I couldn't come out to them. Instead, I've gotta go back to pretending to be 'hot for girls.' But no matter what, no way am I gonna go back to making hurtful, bigoted comments about 'faggots' or 'pansies' like I know Coach will expect me to do.

"You know, Holly, every single one of the team members – the straight guys – is disappointed to be leaving our camp. Well, actually, there's one guy who won't mind, but he's never really cared about the camp – or the Legionnaires. He spent all his time sitting in his tent flying his fucking drone."

(To be continued)

Holly Maholm is a transgender woman living in Cleveland, Ohio. Look for Volume 2 of What Would a Unicorn Do? (now available on Amazon) which contains additional episodes of Holly's on-going story of her life among the unicorns, plus additional articles and a short story of a transgender woman confronted by Satan! Send a message to Holly ***www.hollymaholm.com.***

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Mayor Lightfoot, CTA and CPS Announce "CTA Elevating Futures Scholarship Fund" Now Accepting Applications from CPS High School Students

Mayor Lightfoot, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) today announced that new applications are now being accepted for the *"CTA Elevating Futures Scholarship Fund"*, an innovative program that provides a path for economically disadvantaged youth to pursue education and careers in construction and engineering.

Created in partnership with the Walsh-Fluor Design-Build team -- the contractor for CTA's historic $2.1 billion Red and Purple Modernization (RPM) Phase One Project -- the scholarship program provides aid to students who plan to pursue four-year degrees in construction management, civil engineering, industrial engineering or systems engineering.

"It's important that as a city we continue to invest in our youth and prepare them for the future," said ***Mayor Lightfoot***. "The CTA's innovative scholarship program provides opportunity to hard-working students from low-income backgrounds, helping them achieve their potential in an especially challenging world."

"With every CTA project, we are committed to creating opportunity and inclusion for Chicagoans across the city," said CTA President ***Dorval R. Carter, Jr***. "With potential future labor shortages in these industries, there is a growing opportunity for our youth to enter occupational fields in which they have been historically underrepresented."

The "CTA Elevating Futures Scholarship Fund" was created by CTA in 2019 and is now in its second year. Walsh-Fluor is funding the program with $250,000 for 10 scholarships between 2020 and 2023. Students who are awarded scholarships are also eligible to apply for paid summer internships with Walsh-Fluor. The program is administered by Chicago Scholars, a mentoring and leadership development organization that helps first-generation college students and students from under-resourced communities navigate transitions into college, through college and on to careers.

"We have so many students who work hard and are committed to their education and need financial assistance to achieve their dreams," said CPS CEO ***Dr. Janice K. Jackson***. "The 'CTA Elevating Futures Scholarship Fund,' lessens the barriers they face and gives them the opportunities they need to succeed, especially during such difficult times."

"Chicago Scholars is proud to partner with the CTA and Walsh-Fluor and create important opportunities for CPS students through the 'CTA Elevating Futures Scholarship Fund'," said ***Jeffery Beckham Jr.***, Chicago Scholars Interim CEO. "This fund will elevate opportunities for our financially under-resourced and first-generation Scholars beyond college access as they continue on the path to becoming young professionals and leaders within Chicago's STEM industry."

Program details and timeline

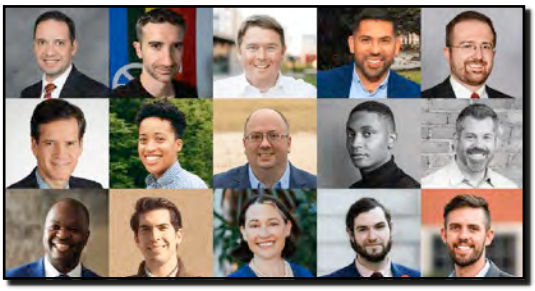
The application period opened Dec. 10, 2020 and applications will be due March 1, 2021. To apply, visit **https://chicagoscholars.org/elevatingfutures** Up to three scholarships will be awarded of $5,500 a year for four years per winner.

Scholarship winners will be announced on April 15, 2021.

Eligible students must be enrolled in a CPS or CPS-supported high school and currently part of the Chicago Scholars program. Chicago Scholars recruits from all 77 community areas of the city and has student representation from 75 CPS and CPS-supported high schools.

Eligible students must be enrolled in STEM coursework, have a grade point average of at least 3.0, and have a good attendance record.

Victory Fund Endorses 15 LGBTQ Candidates for 2021 Cycle



Today LGBTQ Victory Fund, the only national organization dedicated to electing LGBTQ leaders to public office, endorsed 15 LGBTQ candidates for 2021 races. Among the endorsees is Victor Reyes, who is running in a special election for a U.S. House seat in New Mexico, which will be vacant pending the coming Senate confirmation of Rep. Deb Haaland to be U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

Three candidates received Spotlight Candidate endorsements. Elisa Crespo, previously endorsed in her race for New York City Council, was elevated to a Spotlight Candidate and would become the first out trans person elected in New York state. Also receiving the Spotlight Candidate endorsements were Darden Rice, running for mayor of St. Petersburg, and New York state Senator Brad Hoylman, running for Manhattan Borough President. Rice would be the first out LGBTQ mayor of St. Petersburg and Sen. Hoylman the first out LGBTQ Manhattan Borough President.

"There is no such thing as an off-election year and 2021 presents opportunities to elect groundbreaking LGBTQ candidates that can impact policy for millions of Americans," said Mayor Annise Parker, President & CEO of LGBTQ Victory Fund. "We can increase representation in the U.S. Congress, elect big city mayors and help trans leaders shatter long-standing political barriers. We must increase LGBTQ representation not because we desire power for its own sake, but because it leads to pro-equality policies that improve the lives of LGBTQ people."

Gamechanger Endorsement
Victor Reyes
U.S. House of Representatives, NM-01

Spotlight Candidate Endorsements
(Previously Unendorsed)
Brad Hoylman
Manhattan Borough President
Darden Rice
Mayor of St. Petersburg, Florida

Spotlight Candidate Endorsements
(Previously Endorsed)
Elisa Crespo
New York City Council District 15

General Candidate Endorsements
Alex Arroyo
Aurora Township Supervisor
Bryan Barash
Newton City Council, At-Large, Ward 2
Tom Beckius
Lincoln City Council, At-Large
David Donofrio
South-Western City (OH) School District Board of Education Member

Crystal Hudson
New York City Council, District 35
Kirk McPike
Alexandria City Council
Chi Ossé
New York City Council, District 36
Larry Palm
Dane County Supervisor, District 12
Josue Pierre
New York City Council, District 40
Bill Stephens
St. Louis Alderman, Ward 12
Zack Zappone
Spokane City Council, District 3-Position 2

Incumbent Candidate Endorsements
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Eagle Pass City Council Place 2
(Elias currently does not have an opponent.)

More information about all of Victory Fund's endorsed candidates is available at ***victoryfund.org/ourcandidates.***

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WORLD'S FIRST CINEMA RELEASES DEBUT EP *'RITUALS'*

Following on from the huge success of their previously shared singles *"Can't Feel Anything", "Red Run Cold"* and *"Cold Sets In"*, which have since amassed more than two million streams collectively in just three months, found a home on Spotify's Pop Rock Shot, Fresh Finds, Future Hits, Fresh Finds Pop, and Pop Rock playlists, and received key tastemaker support from *Wonderland, Under The Radar, Earmilk, Variance Mag, When The Horn Blows, GIG GOER* and many more, fast-rising duo World's First Cinema now deliver their highly-anticipated debut EP *Rituals* alongside the new lead single "*Youth On Fire."*

Rituals sets up the band's fresh and ambitious sound so far. With an instinct to create bold and vivid alternative pop, this initial collection is the first of many chapters the duo plan to explore, filled with rich and euphoric production amongst a glittering pursuit of captivating storytelling.

Speaking about their vision for the new EP, they said, "The Rituals EP is the ground our castle is being built on. Arguably more important than the songs themselves we wanted to communicate a tonal atmosphere with this EP. We are heavily inspired by the concept of where music meets film and want each of our songs to feel like their own movie."

They continue by sharing "We use a lot of out of the box production techniques to create our music, it's not exactly common practice in most popular music these days but it's how we have the most fun. We love to take theatrical trailer scoring techniques and build them into more pop centric song structures. This song writing & production model paired with our obsession in horror movies, Dungeons & Dragons and cult iconography all culminates to create 'World's First Cinema'.

The new EP is also being previewed by their newest single '"*Youth On Fire."* Much like their work to date, this new cut channels a fresh and vibrant aesthetic that mirrors their own otherworldly direction, creating one of their most impactful releases so far.

Adding about *"Youth On Fire",* they said, "With a veiled approach to a political lyrical concept 'Youth On Fire' explores the current state of the world and the mess we have all created. Complete with an anthemic lyrical hook and monstrous alt rock production this song evolves the signature cinematic sonic style of WFC by injecting it with a hard dose of aggression and angst."

Rituals is available to stream today via B-Unique Records, here: **https://worldsfirstcinema.ffm.to/rituals**

SLOWLY SLOWLY RELEASE NEW SINGLE *"FIRST LOVE"* FT. YOURS TRULY

On the heels of the announce of their upcoming album, *'Race Car Blues – Chapter 2'* due out February 26, Slowly Slowly have released another new song from the album called *"First Love"* feat. Yours Truly.

Unsurprisingly the track is an homage to first loves, while Slowly Slowly's Ben Stewart elaborates that it explores "the rose coloured glasses of retrospection & running from the past." He adds: "I wanted a song that captured the duality of wanting to forget someone, but holding their memory dearly."

On collaborating with Yours Truly vocalist ***Mikaila Delgado*** on the track, Stewart shares:

"I approached Mikaila about the collaboration as I'm a huge fan of Yours Truly. She instantly understood the vibe we were going for and was incredible to work with. Mikaila was really intuitive with building the vocal arrangement, her harmonies and tonality really made the song feel complete."

'Race Car Blues - Chapter 2' spawned from the same sessions as Slowly Slowly's critically-acclaimed 2020 album Race Car Blues. The 12 tracks on Chapter 2 now find themselves completing the Race Car Blues story and will arrive almost a year to the day since the original album's release on Friday, February 26.

Stewart explains that while the tracks on Chapter 2 didn't fit on the original album, overtime the collection took on a life of its own and called for its own record.

"Chapter 2 pushes the envelope a little further in every direction – heavier, more pop sensibility and a deeper dive into intimate solo songs," he adds.

"This is and has always been the ultimate aim for Slowly Slowly, to celebrate the music we love – anthemic heart on sleeve songwriting – but across a broad spectrum of genres. Having no creative ceiling for this project only pushed that ethos further."

Between red raw and highly personal tracks, unpredictable stylistic choices and its namesake as the second chapter of *Race Car Blues*, Chapter 2 marks a significant moment in time for Slowly Slowly as they straddle both past and present as well as a distinctly unbridled future ahead.

UNFD will celebrate the new album with the release of an exclusive Double LP featuring both chapters of Race Car Blues, limited to 500 worldwide. Pre-order the Race Car Blues Extended Edition collection now via 24Hundred.

Stream the single now at this link: ***https://youtu.be/ul3-GZnkT9Q***

MOD SUN RELEASES HIGHLY ANTICIPATED ALBUM "*INTERNET KILLED THE ROCKSTAR"*

The album, produced by John Feldmann (5 Seconds of Summer, The Used, Panic At the Disco), kicks the door open to a brand new chapter of MOD SUN's storied career. Looking back to the Blink-182 posters on his wall, Drive-Thru records in his CD player and beginning of his musical career drumming on the Vans Warped Tour, it only makes sense that MOD would return back to his roots for a punk-rock infused album.

"Everything I made when I was growing up, as a teenager, is fully ingrained into everything I am now making as a 33-year old," shares the multi-faceted artist. "My dream was to create a project that sounds like everything I've done musically."

"Bones", "Karma" and the recently released hit "Flames", featuring global superstar Avril Lavigne, jumpstart Internet Kills The Rockstar with a visual story of emotions and redemption.

"Flames" has peaked at the #8 spot on Billboard's US Rock Digital Song chart and is currently in the Top 50 at Alternative Radio. The single recently entered Spotify's Global and US Viral 50 charts and was added to coveted playlists including Spotify's New Music Friday, Rock This and The New Alt as well as Apple Music's New Music Daily, New In Alternative and more. Outlets including MTV, Entertainment Weekly, NYLON, Alternative Press, GQ Italia and Entertainment Tonight Canada have heralded the song as one of the best new tracks of the year.

Available to stream today via Big Noise: ***https://modsun.fanlink.to/IKTR***

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